DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 080 498 SP 006 790

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TITLE Role Conflict in Student Teaching.
PUB DATE [71]
NOTE 8p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Role Conflict; *Role Perception; *Self Congruence; Student Attitudes; Student Behavior; *Student Teachers; Student Teaching; *Teacher Role; Teacher Supervision

ABSTRACT

A student teacher is often liable to be placed in a conflictive situation between faculty consultants and cooperating teachers who have widely differing conceptions of the role of the ideal teacher. None of the possible responses of a student teacher are conducive to effective learning, especially the decision to "get by." This conflict can be avoided by the adoption of several measures. The supervisory team should be quite explicit with each other and the student teacher about their role ideals; overwhelming role dissension should result in a rematch of supervisors. The consequences of enacting certain roles should be made clear to the student teacher. The student teacher should then be allowed to enact these roles experimentally in a nonevaluative atmosphere and ultimately be allowed to choose and practice the teacher role which is most congruent with himself. (JA)

ED 080498

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ROLE CONFLICT IN STUDENT TEACHING

Manfred Prokop

Student teaching has been described as a social system within which the student teacher is expected to learn how to behave as a teacher (19). Consequently, at the basis of all teacher education programs there is a more or less explicit commitment to help the student teacher perceive and acquire the role of the teacher which is deemed desirable by the educators at the university and in the schools; to aid him in learning the skills appropriate to the enactment of that role; and to provide assistance in the acquisition of subject matter which is communicated in the course of the teaching process.

The teacher role is, however, not a unified phenomenon; the teacher will behave in certain ways vis-á-vis the students, the social and educational communities, and these role may overlap to varying degrees (2). The teacher education program, for a number of reasons, concentrates to a major extent on the proper learning of the teaching component of the teacher role.

In methods courses, student teaching situations and consulting and feedback sessions with the faculty consultant and the cooperating teacher the student teacher is exposed to a variety of role ideals held for him by the two main communicators of the teacher role: the faculty consultant and the cooperating teacher. To be sure, there are other sources of role expectations, such as the community at large, the parents, the student teacher's students, and his own role ideals (26); yet it is the faculty consultant and the cooperating teacher who represent systematic influences.

There is agreement in the professional literature that faculty consultants and cooperating teachers have widely differing conceptions of the role of the ideal teacher (1, 4, 9, 10, 11, 22, 25); the faculty consultant may be more idealistically oriented towards the implications for teaching of educational

SP 006 790

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theory, while the cooperating teacher may be more realistically concerned with the day-to-day tasks of effective teaching (23). Basic to these general expectations are philosophical ideals, such as "creativity", "innovativeness", "pragmatism", "social relevance", "discovery orientation", "intellectualism", "obedience and conformity orientation" and the like. It is quite clear, however, that these "aims" require the enactment of certain roles by means of certain role-specific skills. A teacher who attempts to foster creativity in children behaves differently from another teacher who is more interested in reception learning of facts and principles.

As both cooperating teacher and faculty consultant have the authority to enforce the proper learning of role enactment by means of sanctions, the student teacher may find himself in a conflict as to which role he should choose for himself. Indeed, the professional literature warns the beginning student teacher of the potential existence of such conflict and cautions him to avoid an aggravation of the problem by getting himself entangled in this complex relationship (6).

Conflict would not ensue if sanctions weren't threatened and/or imposed; but as long as they do exist, the student teacher in such a conflict situation has the choice of either rejecting one or both role pressures or to try and compromise between them (7). It has been shown that the cooperating teacher's role perceptions are usually the ones which the student teacher tends to embrace (8, 14, 15, 17).

The adaptive responses available to the student teacher to cope with role conflict may range from hostility, aggressiveness and rejection to withdrawal or submission (13). None of these responses is conducive to effective learning, and everyone may produce psychological damage in the student teacher (18) as there is a strong relationship between role behavior and the student teacher's self. Research has shown that most effective role enactment takes place when role behavior and personality dispositions coincide (3, 5, 21, 24). If there is

incongruence between the two, the resulting cognitive strain may lead to the above-mentioned coping responses, and the sanctions - imagined or real - can then be seen as threats not only to the professional development process, but also to the student teacher's self as a person. Even the one response which is most likely to allow the student teacher to remain in the teacher education program in such a situation (viz. submission) is likely to lead to undesirable consequences as overt role behavior may be merely conformity behavior in order to "get by" (16). This simulated acceptance of desirable role enactment may serve to explain the fact that student teachers' learning has frequently been observed to "decay" after completion of the teacher education program (12, 20).

Imagine a case, if you will, where the faculty consultant is highly discovery-learning oriented (with all the strategies and behavior which this aim would require) and where the cooperating teacher is more concerned with the "traditional" methods and aims of instruction. What would happen to the student teacher who finds himself between these two poles and chooses the cooperating teacher's role expectations ? Would he face frequent criticism and low marks in the methods courses, a low grade point average with all consequent implications ? Or the student teacher who selects the faculty consultant's role expectations; would he get reports about ineffectual teaching, wasting time etc. and criticism as a poor prospect for the teaching profession ? How many student teachers choose to please both supervisors in the appropriate surroundings, don't transfer knowledge acquired at the university to the classroom (and, vice versa, experiences gained in the classroom to the methods course) and finish not having really learned anything at all ? How many student teachers leave the teacher education program and what are their reasons ? Or take the example of a student teacher whose own role expectations differ considerably from those held by the cooperating

teacher as well as the faculty consultant. Many supervisors will have had similar if not so extreme experiences.

How can such role conflict be avoided or used constructively in the student teacher's learning process ? First of all, the importance of clarity of role expectations should be recognized by the supervisors and the student teacher. The supervisory team should be quite clear and explicit about their own and the other's role ideals and should make them equally explicit to the student teacher. If possible, a unified role ideal (in terms of educational theory and practice) should be presented to him; if role dissensus is found to be overwhelming the supervisors should be re-matched; if there is agreement on some points and disagreement on others the resulting low-conflict situation can actually be productive of effective role learning if sanctions are effectively removed because relatively low cognitive dissonance can be more conducive to learning than no dissonance at all.

Second, the supervisory team should discuss in detail with the student teacher the consequences of enacting certain roles; the faculty consultant should provide educational theory and the cooperating teacher should supply probable implications for the classroom routine.

Third, the student teacher should be given the opportunity to enact these roles experimentally and tentatively in a non-evaluative atmosphere (for instance, in micro-teaching, mini-course or simulation sessions); in this way the student teacher will widen his behavioral repertoire and will be able to choose appropriate behavioral strategies when required. Supervisors should criticize constructively the student teacher's performance on the spot and its likely effect on a classroom situation.

Fourth, the student teacher should then be allowed to select the teacher role which is most congruent with his self, and should be given ample internship practice before finally completing the methods part of the teacher edu-

cation program.

If the training system were free enough it would also admit a student teacher to teaching who did not choose a cherished role ideal. After all, if the student teacher merely simulates acceptance of role ideals held for him he may revert to role behavior later which doesn't coincide either with the desired ideals. If he were given the freedom to choose and practice his own role ideal he could become an expert in relevant role behavior that is most suited to his own personality disposition. It is well recognized, of course, that there are "effective" teachers over a wide range of teaching behaviors as long as they exhibit the essential characteristics of every genuine interaction between human beings.

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